Informer Fears for Life

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Somewhere in Metropolitan Washington, a rotund, ex-government informer is sitting up at night — a revolver in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other — trying to stay awake and hoping to prevent what he fears will be another attempt to kill him.

His suburban home on a tree-lined cul-de-sac looks like the others in the middle-class neighborhood. In the past, however, sharp-eyed neighbors could have noticed the daily change-of-guard at 8 a.m.by the U.S marshals assigned to protect him or see the marshals' guns glinting in the sun when they removed their jackets to shoot basketball.

At that time, the admitted swindler had been actively testifying for the government under his given name of Franklin Peroff. He provided information that helped crack large-scale counterfeiting and international drug-smuggling schemes.

In return, the government gave the New York-born, 39-year-old man a new identity and set him and his family up in a new location as part of a government program to relocate and protect government witnesses.

The marshals disappeared as planned, probably much to the relief of such people as the gas meter reader they once roughed up when he didn't promptly display his identification at their request.

Peroff, who uses another name, was himself glad to see the marshals go so he could begin a "new life" and what he said are new, legitimate business ventures.

Last week, however, a shotgun blast that he said shattered his car window and missed his head by inches sent him pleading to the marshals for renewed protection.

See PEROFF, A9, Col.1

PEROFF, From A1

They have refused, he said, and he has filed a lawsuit asking a judge to order him protected against future possible attempts on his life.

A Justice Department spokesman confirmed that the department had refused to authorize current protection for Peroff, but said he could not give a specific reason for the refusal. He pointed out, however, that legislation setting up the program authorizes protection of witnesses whose lives are endangered because of "testimony they have given in legal proceedings."

A spokesman for the U.S. marshal's service also refused to comment on the Peroff situation, saying he could not comment on a case in which a suit has been filed.

"I'm falling apart now," Peroff said in a telephone interview. "I want to get the hell out of here."

He has kept his five children out of school and his wife at home since the shooting more than eight days ago, and has not had a full night's sleep himself, Peroff said. He has told a business associate only that he is too ill to come to work, and not the real reason for his absence'

"What am I supposed to do?" Peroff asked. "When you've got five children and a wife, you don't just grab them under the arm and disappear."

In the suit, Peroff accused a Senate aide of disclosing his new identity to a doctor who reportedly disclosed it to a credit agency attempting to collect a delinquent medical bill from Peroff.

New identities of relocated witnesses are among the most tightly held government secrets, Justice Department officials have said in the past.

Suspicious events started occurring shortly after the credit agency began dunning him, Peroff said.

First, his wife was followed by a mysterious car. Then, he said he was forced off the Dulles access road by a car with Florida license plates.

On Feb. 4, he said, he was on his way home fron an early evening trip to the store when a car pulled out of a side street and onto the road, headed toward him with its bright lights on.

As the car approached him, Peroff said, he specifically looked for a front license plate and saw none. Then, "I saw a head and shoulders come out of the back of the car ' '. I'm not quite sure I saw a gun or not," Peroff said.

Peroff said he tried to adjust his massive bulk so he could duck, and hit an embankment with his car. Simultaneously, he heard an explosion. Although he was able to drive his car away, he said he saw the window was shattered and the back of the driver's seat had been hit with a shotgun blast.

He said he immediately asked for protection and an FBI investigation, but neither has occurred. He said also he is afraid to tell the police department that has jurisdiction over his home community, saying he doesn't know whether the police can be trusted.

So, he has locked his car in his garage to preserve what he said is evidence of the attack and has armed hinself for protection. The suit filed on behalf of Peroff by attorney Harvey Katz is pending before U.S. District Judge Joseph C. Waddy.

Peroff said he feels that his enemies range from some members of law enforcement agencies of which he has been critical, to "all of organized crime."

His lawsuit against the government includes allegations that it has reneged on numerous specific aspects of a written contract it provided him when he was relocated.

However, Peroff and his attorney said their first priority at this point is immediate protection for the Peroff family.

They're (the government) saying they're not responsible for me. By God, they got me into this," Peroff said.

Peroff, whose five children range in age from 8 to 15, has said he first became connected with organized crime in the mid-1960s when he served as a fence for stolen goods in Florida.

He also has said that he leased private airplanes for smuggling and flying organized crime figures in and out of the country, and "gained the reputation in certain criminal circles as a person who had the capabilities to fly in and out the of the United States, Canada and elsewhere, undetected."

Peroff's role as an informant first surfaced publicly in the early 1970s, when his information led to the arrest and conviction of Canadian Conrad Bouchard and broke what some call the "French Connection" and its supplying of narcotics to the continental United States.

Out of that same inquiry, Peroff accused federal drug agents of ignoring information he had received that allegedly linked financier Robert Vesco with financing drug purchases.

The alleged Vesco link was never proven, but a lengthy report by the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations last year found that Drug Enforcement Administration personnel "conducted themselves in an unprofessional manner in connection with the heroin inquiry."

One of the investigators in that probe, Senate Subcommittee aide Philip R. Manuel, is the person accused in the suit of blowing Peroff's cover.